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REVIEW ARTICLE

Unravelling the Dominance: An Exploration of the Relationship Between the Medicalisation of Ordinary Mental Distress, the Primacy of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, and the Influence of Neoliberal Ideology in the UK Mental Health Economy

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the predominant status of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy within the UK mental health sector, and critiques its alignment with the concept of individual responsibility within neoliberal ideology and the tendency towards the medicalisation of mental distress. Drawing from the field of critical psychology, which historically questions the medicalised approach to mental health within the field of psychiatry, this analysis extends into cognitive psychology's clinical applications and questions the scientific underpinnings and widespread acceptance of cognitive behavioural therapy as the prevailing clinical method. Through a critical literature review and evaluation of existing research, the article reports potential biases and methodological flaws identified by researchers, drawing conclusions that its efficacy has been exaggerated and its scientific credibility might be partly constructed. Furthermore, by reviewing research into the qualitative dimensions of the conceptual framework and discursive practices of cognitive behavioural therapy, the author describes how its dominance could be perpetuating individualistic and pathologizing approaches to mental distress. These approaches contribute to the broader medicalisation trends observed in contemporary mental health practices, which both reflect and reinforce the ideological role of individualism in late modern capitalism.

Keywords: cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT); evidence based therapy (EBT); CBT critiques; medicalisation of mental health; mental distress; scientification of mental health; individualisation of mental health